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Gender and the New Coalition Government in Greece

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Prior to its rise to power, SYRIZA had adopted a position where feminist and gender issues were considered integral to its political project. In SYRIZA's official rhetoric and contrary to most other political parties in Greece, gender inequality was seen as a crucial aspect of the crisis of the Greek economy and society. This position reflected and echoed the analyses of feminist left-wing economists, whose work showed that despite some initial improvements in gender gaps, women in Greece continued to be disadvantaged and were to be hit even more by the austerity measures than men, if further cuts in the public sector and welfare politics were enforced (Karamessini/ Rubery 2014). After the elections, the picture seems to have changed. Although SYRIZA has managed to achieve the greatest percentages of female MPS in the Greek Parliament[1] and although it is a member of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), the only political party with equal representation of men and women in the European parliament, in the new coalition government only six out of 40 cabinet members are women (15%). Out of 40 members, there are no female senior cabinet members, only one female undersecretary and five deputy-ministers – two of which are from the coalition party ANEL – Independent Greeks. In addition, Nadia Valavani, who was appointed Vice Minister of Finance was replaced by a male colleague in July 2015.

Lack of Equal Gender Representation in the New Government

The new government has received a lot of criticism by feminists in Greece and abroad. A group of 66 Spanish feminist organizations published an open letter to the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, entitled "Without Women there is no Democracy," in which it was made clear that the disappointing underrepresentation of women in the new executive was a decision that undermined the democratic character of the government. Also, amongst SYRIZA organizations and supporters, many voices openly spoke against the gender imbalance of the new government, taking it as a proof that the remnants of conservative antifeminism were still dominant across political party lines in Greece. In addition, the coalition right-wing political party, ANEL – Independent Greeks had adopted a female friendly but anti-feminist and conservative discourse that promotes an ethno-nationalist rhetoric of women as mo-

thers of the nation and emphasizes the significance of child bearing as a strategy against the Greek demographic deficit.
The government's disregard for the equal representation of women may be attributed to the loss of autonomous dynamics of the feminist movement in the Greek left since the beginning of the economic crisis. Previously, and especially in the context of the anti-globalization movements of the 1990s, left-wing feminists in Greece had developed autonomous groups, who criticized the male dominated structures and gender hierarchies in left-wing politics. During the 2004 European Parliament elections an all-female ballot of left-wing feminists "Women for Another Europe" was introduced, which succeeded in ranking seventh in votes. This move, however, was not repeated in the 2009 elections, since most feminists sought to transform gender politics from within SYRIZA.
While SYRIZA has been reluctant in terms of equal gender representation in the government, the party proposed a female candidate for president in the parliament. Zoe Konstantopoulou was elected, becoming only the second woman in Greek history to hold this prestigious position. In the mainstream media, however, Konstantopoulou is constantly portrayed as a "Jacobin", as autocratic, conflictual, vicious, uncivilized and too "hysterical", and her appearance and dress code are repeatedly scrutinized and criticized. This is an indicator of how difficult it has become to question and challenge deep-rooted gender privilege in Greek political elites, even if the female politician in question is not a feminist.

"The Rubber Glove Revolution"

One of the most important challenges to male privilege in Greek politics has emerged from the struggles of low-class precarious women working in the cleaning and care sectors. In 2008, Konstantina Kuneva, a Bulgarian cleaner and labour unionist, was attacked by two men and forced to drink vitriolic acid. She survived the attack and reported that as a labour unionist and activist she had been repeatedly threatened by the management of the cleaning company that she was working for, since she tried to expose labour rights violations. These included cases were employees, most of which were immigrants, were forced to sign blank contracts, were threatened with dismissal when demanding their rightful payment and worked overtime without compensation. Despite these allegations, the police failed to conduct an investigation and the perpetrators were never found. In the context of the 2008 revolts, protest and support for cleaners' demands spread all over Greece and Kuneva became an icon for all precarious struggles of left-wing, anarchist, feminist, anti-racist and migrant groups, as well as for some independent labour unions. In a symbolic move, Kuneva was invited to be part of the electoral list of SYRIZA and was elected in the 2014 European elections.
Another challenge to Greek gender politics dates back to 2012, when 595 female cleaners were fired from the Greek Ministry of Finance. Ironically the cleaners, who

had been working at the Ministry for most of their lives on a six month project basis, were employed on indefinite open-end contracts only some months prior to their dismissals, after an EU directive forced the Greek government to hire them as public sector employees. The cleaners – all women and most of them over 50 – began a protest by camping outside the Ministry of Finance. Subsequently, the struggle of these precarious middle-aged Greek women became paradigmatic of the social struggles of all precarious people in Greece irrespectively of gender, color, or race.

One of the first decisions of the newly elected government was to give the 595 cleaners their jobs back. The Minister of Finance at that time, Yanis Varoufakis, walked to the camping protest site in person to announce the good news to the protestors. This symbolic move is exemplary of a politics addressing financial issues through the everyday lives of precarious people and provided a powerful alternative to the predominant hegemonic discourse of the crisis. Much more than an abstract endorsement of the positive impact of gender equality in the Greek economy, this gesture showed the willingness of the coalition government to accept a gender perspective of the crisis.

In the light of these struggles over the highly precarious and feminized sector of cleaning and despite established male privilege in the SYRIZA/ANEL government, Rania Antonopoulos' appointment as Deputy Minister for Employment also confirmed SYRIZA/ANEL government's intention to address Greece's rising unemployment levels and to propose a new job guarantee policy through a gender perspective. As an academic, she had emphasized the need to enhance public investment in female dominated sectors, such as social care and the environment, instead of investment in male dominated sectors, such as infrastructure or energy. Such gender sensitive choices are less costly and promise spill-over as well as long-term effects across society (Antonopoulos et al. 2015). In addition to the creation of new jobs, public investment in these sectors promotes women's employment and enables community-based initiatives to develop.

LGBTQ demands and SYRIZA

During the 1990s, LGBTQ groups multiplied and became much more visible in Greece and active in voicing their demands in public. As a result previously marginalized political issues such as same-sex civil partnership, marriage and adoption, or the rights of trans-gender people to self-identification were now addressed more openly within left-wing debates. SYRIZA's electoral strategies, however, reflected mostly a feminist orientation with a focus on women, while being reluctant towards other gender identities and politics. Unlike migrant activists, who were invited to take part as SYRIZA candidates in previous local elections, LGBTQ activists are not represented in the party. The failure to openly recognize LGBTQ activists as capable of representing the party is indicative of the homophobic and transphobic bias that still prevails in some sections of the Greek left. Notwithstanding these ongoing ho-

mophobic and transphobic tendencies, the SYRIZA/ANEL government drafted an amendment to existing legislation stipulating the extension of the civil partnership to include LGBTQ couples – even despite ANEL's reluctance to vote for it.
The decision to draft this new legislation shows the broader influence of LGBTQ activism on SYRIZA. One of the factors that had challenged homophobia and transphobia in the 2000s was the electoral rise of the neo Nazi group Golden Dawn and their verbal and physical violence against left-wing activists, migrants and LGBTQ people. The adoption of the same agenda by mainstream political forces played a crucial role in shifting and broadening the debates on gender in the left. An emblematic event that mobilized public support and solidarity amongst feminist, migrant and LGBTQ groups occurred in 2012, when the Ministry of Public Health decided to publish images of HIV-positive female drug addict prostitutes as a "threat to public health" in the national media. Subsequently, many sex workers were imprisoned and brought to justice by the public prosecutor. Moreover, a new health directory was introduced in the same year that allowed governmental health and infectious disease agencies to enforce compulsory HIV testing of particular groups considered as potentially dangerous, such as migrants, sex workers and drug addicts. Only a few months after the new government was elected, in June 2015, the Minister of Health announced the abolition of health provision 39A.[2]

Conclusion

Although women's equal representation and their participation in decision making processes in the Greek government are important questions, they are not the only ones to be asked when analyzing the gender politics in Greece. It is equally important to consider feminist, queer, transgender, anti-racist and migrant struggles and to examine to what extent they influence the government's gender politics. In that respect, the first months of the SYRIZA/ANEL coalition have demonstrated that it is possible to advance a gendered agenda when social struggles come to the forefront of political debates even though feminists and LGBTQ activists are not represented in the government. However, this was possible only because SYRIZA's pre-election campaign strategically supported gender struggles. Following the negotiations of June-July 2015, it becomes apparent that the SYRIZA/ANEL government is under a lot of pressure to implement a neo-liberal agenda, in which gender issues are more likely to be marginalized once again. Part of the forthcoming agreement stipulates the annulment of legislation adopted by the coalition government during the previous six month period, which includes the re-hiring of the cleaners at the Ministry of Finance and other gender equality measures that question the politics of austerity. Given the internationalization of the Greek crisis, the lack of female representation in EU institutions and most importantly the lack of a gender agenda in the international negotiations are likely to further undermine gender equality in Greece.

Notes

1 In parliament, SYRIZA managed to secure the largest percentage of women amongst all political parties. In 2015, 45 out of 149 MPs are women (30,2%); the second largest party, right-wing New Democracy, has ten women out of 76 MPs (13,2%), Golden Dawn two women out of 17 MPs (11,8%), the River four women out of 17 MPs (23,5%), the communist party KKE four women out of 15 MPs (26,7%), the ANEL party three women out of 13 MPs (23,1%) and PASOK two women out of 13 MPs (15,4%).

2 The health provision 39A stipulated that in order to protect public health certain categories of the population should be tested regularly by public authorities. The provision opened up the way for the enforcement of HIV testing on marginalized sections of the population living in Greece.

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Das Ende einer Ära? Gleichstellungspolitische Programme der Europäischen Union[1]

PETRA AHRENS

Die Gleichstellung von Männern und Frauen zählt zu den Grundwerten der Europäischen Union. Gleichstellungs- und Antidiskriminierungspolitik ist im Vertrag von Lissabon[2], im Vertrag über die Arbeitsweise der Europäischen Union[3] und in der Charta der Grundrechte[4] der Europäischen Union fest verankert. Seit Beginn der aktuellen Amtszeit der Europäischen Kommission 2014 gibt es zudem mit Věra Jourová erstmals in der EU-Geschichte eine EU-Kommissarin, deren Zuständigkeitsbereich neben „Justiz" und „Verbraucherschutz" auch „Gleichstellung" im Titel trägt. Und auch Kommissionspräsident Jean-Claude Juncker postulierte als eine zentrale Leitlinie in seiner Bewerbung um das Amt, „sowohl auf der politischen als auch auf der Verwaltungsebene für eine ausgewogene Vertretung von Frauen und Männern zu sorgen" (Juncker 2014, 14).